

## Consider Safety When Landscaping

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

When I say that you need to consider safety when landscaping, you all are probably thinking that I'm talking about calling Kansas811 to locate underground utilities. Or perhaps you think I'm referring to safety in using power tools or even hand tools. Well, those are all important, but what I'm really referring to is making sure that your landscaping doesn't create safety hazards around your house. Safety from slipping on fruit or nuts that may fall on the sidewalk or driveway. Thinking about making sure you have lots of sunshine in the winter to melt the snow and ice. And it's also about making sure you don't have trees and shrubs too close to the house that might hide intruders or potential muggers or attackers. All of these things need to be considered.

Several weeks ago I sadly watched a tree crew take down the big old ponderosa pine on the northwest corner of the Geary County Courthouse. The tree was still alive. But its days were numbered anyway. It had to be severely pruned in recent years to keep it out of utility wires. The final straw was that upcoming construction that needed to be done, for security purposes. Could they have tried to keep the tree and work around it? Possibly, but the tree has had such limited root space and area to expand in to for years that it was likely only a matter of time before a critical structural failure was likely to occur.

In years gone by, security around our homes, businesses and even governmental offices wasn't a concern. The number of people with intent to do someone harm were few. We could landscape with pleasing aesthetic principles in mind. We could use various size shrubs to accent an entryway and not worry about people hiding behind them wanting to do harm to us. I can remember even 35 years ago, though, visiting with older homeowners and encouraging them to remove those large and oversized juniper shrubs around their front door because of the risk of someone hiding behind them.

The days of landscaping with large shrubs, or even medium sized shrubs, needs to be put behind us. Move those shrubs to the corners of the property. Small shrubs, less than two feet tall can likely still be used. But if anything bigger than a cat can hide behind them, don't use them next to the house. Small trees can still be used around the corners of the house to soften the lines, as long as they aren't evergreen trees. Basically, you want to keep clear sight lines from within the house as well as from outside the house.

As we have seen in recent years, wildfires can strike almost anywhere. With warmer and drier climates likely, wildfires can become an even bigger risk. We've seen in recent weeks how even houses in towns and cities can be at risk from wildfire. Start taking a look at your house and yard to see if there are ways to reduce the wildfire risk. Remove any evergreen shrubs or trees next to houses. Evergreens are highly flammable and they get worse when things get dry. To say that they are explosively flammable may be an understatement. Remove trees that overhang the house and drop leaves on the roof. Evergreens, pines, are the worst, but any dried up leaves on your roof are easy targets for blowing embers to start on fire. You want a fire defensible front all around your house. The Kansas Forest Service has a great bulletin titled "Protecting Your Home from Wildfire." Copies are available online or at the Extension Office.